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CULINARY HERBS

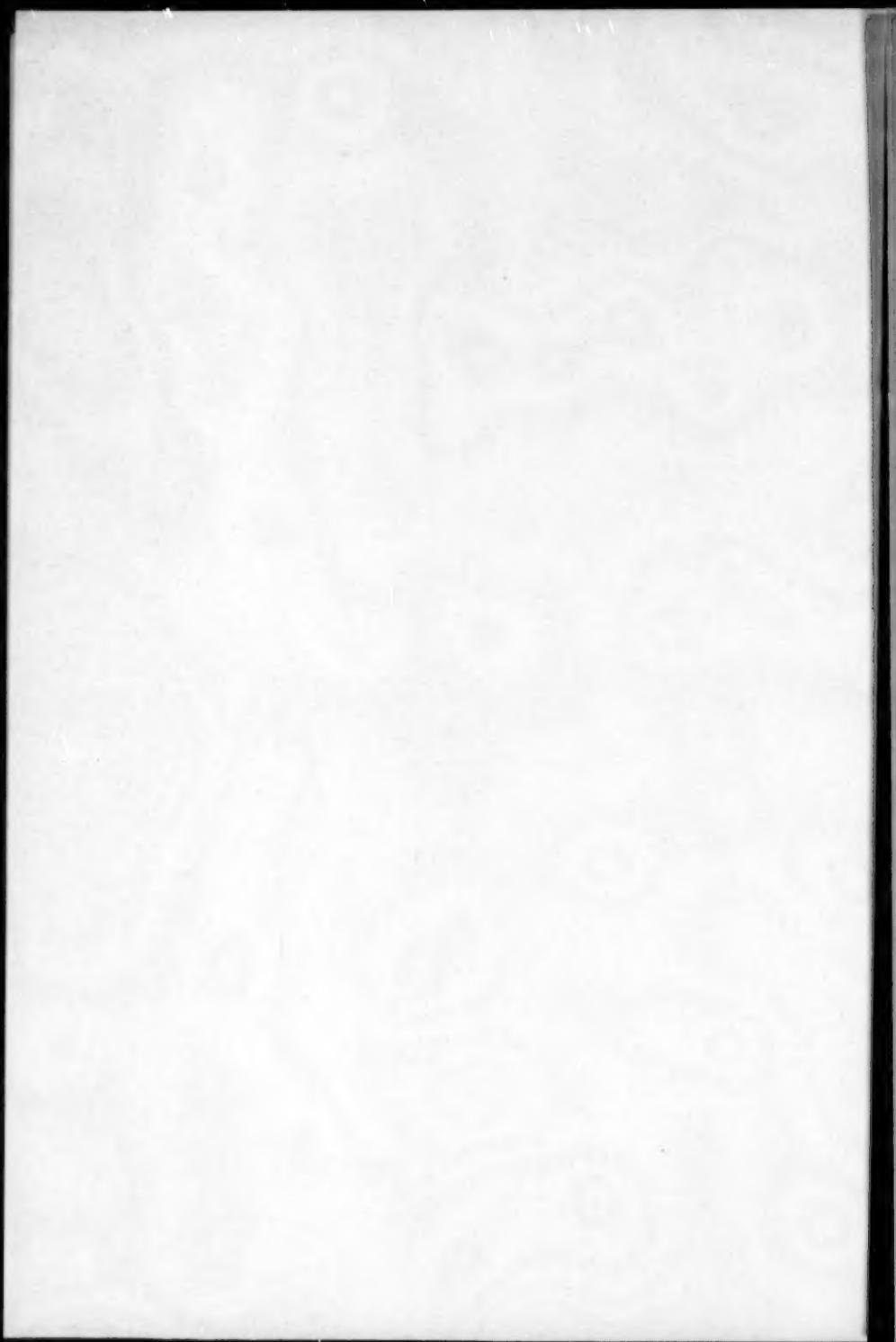
By Augustus Myron A. Rice, and Babette I. Brown



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# Culinary Herbs

W. C. MUENSCHER, MYRON A. RICE, AND BABETTE I. BROWN

THE culinary, household, or condimental herbs are garden plants grown for flavoring or seasoning food, improving the diet, and preparing tea-like beverages. They are the garden spice plants, and their essential oils give them characteristic flavors and aromas.

Parsley, often regarded as a common vegetable, is the leading culinary herb. Other herbs of more than average value are basil, sage, summer savory, winter savory, common thyme, creeping thyme, sweet marjoram, wild marjoram, spearmint, apple mint, chives, and lemon balm. A limited choice of the best culinary herbs might include parsley, chives, sage, thyme, summer savory, basil, and spearmint.

The numerous inquiries received concerning these culinary herbs show the increased interest in their culture and use. This bulletin, based upon experience with herbs in the vicinity of Ithaca, New York, consists of a summary of material prepared by members of the Department of Botany and used for several years in mimeographed leaflets to answer these inquiries. Only the more common kinds of herbs or those easily grown in the home garden and those which are the subject of most frequent inquiry are here included. Some of the many available books on herbs have detailed information on special kinds.

## Some Common Culinary Herbs and Their General Culture

### Annual Herbs

Annual herbs must be started from seed. They can be grown on any good, well-drained garden soil that is suitable for beans. Seed should not be sown outdoors until the soil is warm. Some time can be gained by starting the seeds in a small window box in a kitchen and transplanting them into the garden when the danger of frost is past.

Some common annual herbs are:

- Dill—*Anethum graveolens*
- Anise—*Pimpinella anisum*
- Coriander—*Coriandrum sativum*
- Chervil—*Antibriscus cerifolium*
- Fennel—*Foeniculum vulgare*
- Summer savory—*Satureja hortensis*

Basil—*Ocimum basilicum*

Marjoram—*Marjorana bortensis*

Borage—*Borago officinalis*

Chamomile (German)—*Matricaria chamomilla*

#### **Biennial Herbs**

Biennial herbs can be grown only from seed. They require two years to produce seed and then they die. Seed should be sown outdoors but not until after the soil is warm, and where the seedlings can be left undisturbed for two years.

Some common biennial herbs are:

Caraway—*Carum carvi*

Seeds mature and are harvested in late summer of the second year.

Parsley—*Petroselinum bortense*

Leaves are used the first season and early in the second year before flower stalks appear. Seeds if desired for sowing may be harvested when they start to shed. They may be planted in autumn or the following spring. Dried seeds are slow to germinate.

Claret sage, clary—*Salvia Sclarea*

Leaves are used the first season. It flowers in the second year. Seeds may be treated as are those of parsley.

#### **Non-hardy Herbs**

Herbs that are non-hardy in most parts of New York State are best treated as annuals or they may be grown as perennials in pots indoors. Plants may be started indoors as are annuals, from seed or from cuttings rooted in a mixture of wet sand and peat. Softwood cuttings root more readily than those taken from older or hard wood.

The following herbs are non-hardy in most of New York State:

Lemon Verbena—*Lippia citriodora*

Rosemary—*Rosmarinus officinalis*

Pennyroyal—*Mentha pulegium*

Lavender—*Lavandula* (some varieties)

#### **Perennial Herbs**

Perennial herbs may be started from seed and also from cuttings or runners or by division of old plants. All but those marked with an asterisk (\*) require good drainage and prefer lighter soils. When once established, they may thrive for several or many years if not allowed to be overrun by grass. Those with runners should be taken up and replanted once every 2 or 3 years to give best results.

Lemon balm—*Melissa officinalis*  
Horehound—*Marrubium vulgare*  
Sage—*Salvia officinalis*  
Hyssop—*Hyssopus officinalis*  
Winter savory—*Satureja montana*  
\*Applemint—*Mentha rotundifolia*  
\*Spearmint—*Mentha spicata*  
\*Peppermint—*Mentha piperita*  
Wild marjoram—*Origanum vulgare*  
Lavender—*Lavandula officinalis*  
Thyme—*Thymus vulgare*  
Creeping thyme—*Thymus Serpyllum*  
\*Horse-radish—*Aromoracia rusticana*  
Chives—*Allium Schoenoprasum*  
Garlic—*Allium sativum*  
Tarragon—*Artemisia Dracunculus*  
Costmary—*Chrysanthmum Balsamita*  
Chamomile—*Anthemis nobilis*  
Burnet—*Sanguisorba minor*  
Sweet Woodruff—*Asperula odorata*  
Lovage—*Levisticum officinale*

### *Propagation of Herbs*

THE annual and biennial herbs by their very nature must be started from seed. Some perennial herbs are also easily started from seeds; others are best started by propagation from bulbils, cuttings of stems, runners, or from divisions of crowns or root crowns from established plants. Such material taken on May 1 from plants established for many years in an herb garden at Ithaca, New York, are shown in figure 1. These plants had grown outdoors without any protection. The cuttings could have been made two weeks earlier, before the new growth had already advanced to the stage indicated.

The herbs illustrated (figure 1) as kinds for which vegetative propagation is recommended instead of sowing seed, with the part used and the reasons therefore, are the following:



*Drawing by Elfriede Abbe*

Figure 1. Vegetative parts used for propagating herbs

A. Sweet woodruff	F. Costmary
B. Tarragon	G. Lavender
C. Lovage	H. Chives
D. Applemint	I. Winter savory
E. Sage	J. Thyme
K. Lemon balm	

- B. Tarragon (true), *root crowns*, does not produce seed.
- C. Lovage, *crown divisions*, authentic viable seed almost unavailable.
- D. Apple mint, *runners*, seed is not commercially available because most cultivated mints only very rarely set seed.
- E. Sage, *cuttings*, strains with desirable qualities often do not come true to seed.
- F. Costmary, *runners*, seed rarely available.
- G. Lavender, *cuttings*, only certain strains are winter hardy, these may be maintained; plants from seeds often do not prove hardy in regions without mild winters.

The following start easily and save time

- A. Sweet woodruff, *runners*
- H. Chives, *bulbets*
- I. Winter savory, *stem cuttings*
- J. Thyme, *stem cuttings*
- K. Lemon balm, *runners*

The first step in the propagation of herbs is to locate a source of authentic material. Dealers usually handle items for which there is a demand.

### *Plans for Small Herb Gardens*

**A** SUGGESTED layout for a small collection of six kinds of herbs is indicated in figure 2. Such a small plot may occupy a corner near a garage or an edge of the perennial border. The front should face south or east to provide enough sunlight.

The mints, whichever kind is preferred, should occupy the background because they are higher and can be confined with less disturbance to prevent them from overrunning the more modest herbs. A few sage plants may be placed in front of the mints where they may be left undisturbed for many years. They become small shrubs and may be cut back to 6 or 8 inches from the ground level in autumn or early spring. The front, or outer edge, of the plot may be edged with a short row of chives in clumps which may be cut freely, or alternate clumps may be left to flower in alternate years for their ornamental effect. When once established, the chives are good for many years if the grass is kept out and their bulbs are left undisturbed. Their position may be bounded by a clump of thyme at each end. The strip between the sage and chives should be spaded each spring for annual sowing of seeds of parsley and summer savory. Other annuals may be substituted or added

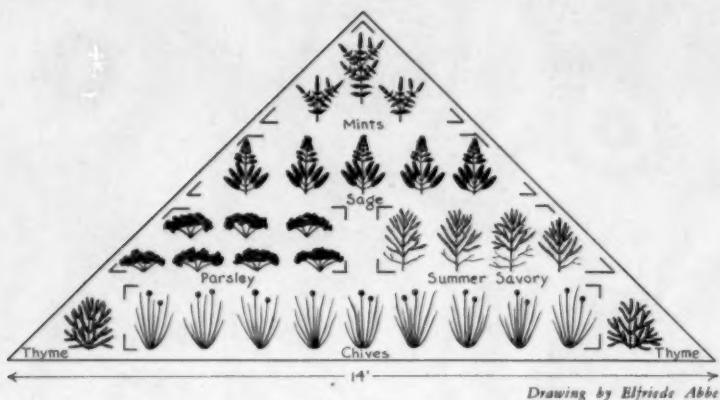


Figure 2. A plan for a small planting of herbs

as desired. These annuals need cultivation and should not be expected to compete with root interference from the perennials.

A plan similar to that in figure 2 and large enough for a home herb garden with more varieties, including ten kinds, is shown in figure 3. Here, too, the annuals are in the center and the perennials around the border. By following such a plan, the roots of the perennials need not be disturbed in preparing the soil for the annuals.

### *Harvesting, Storing, and Drying of Herbs*

#### *Harvesting*

The following herbs are harvested by clipping the tops at the stage of full bloom: hyssop, lavender, rosemary, thyme, and wormwood. The leaves and flowers are harvested together, but rosemary leaves may be picked separately.

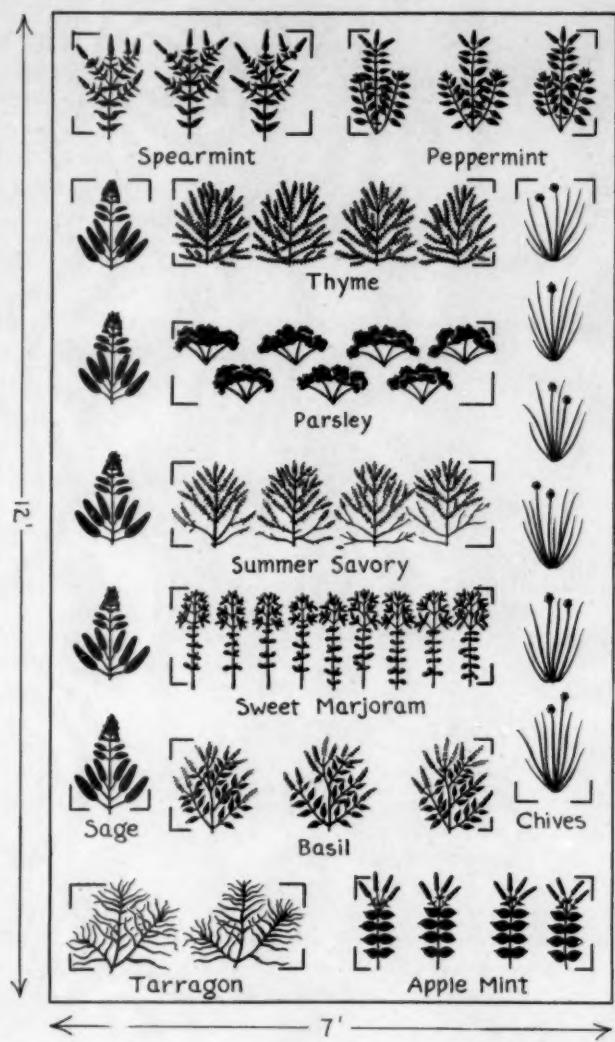
Herbs harvested in the pre-bloom stage or about the time blooming starts are basil, costmary, fennel, horehound, sometimes lavender, mint, sage, summer savory, sweet marjoram, tarragon, and winter savory.

Parsley for drying is cut or picked during the leafy stage.

Chervil and caraway leaves for drying are handled about the same as parsley.

Lovage leaves are best harvested during the early flush growth.

The flower heads of chamomile and German chamomile are harvested and dried.



Drawing by Elfriede Abbe

Figure 3. A plan for a small herb garden

Herbs producing seeds or fruits used for flavoring or culinary purposes are anise, burnet, caraway, clary, coriander, dill, fennel and lovage. Seeds and fruits for culinary consumption are best harvested in the early stages of ripening, to prevent excessive losses from shattering, to obtain a bright, clean, well-colored, and attractive product, and to conserve the essential oils, aromas, and flavors. Seeds harvested for culinary use may also be used for planting, provided their viability has not been impaired by too long storage or other treatment.

Parsley and chive leaves are frequently preferred fresh. These herbs and many of the perennial kinds can be kept growing throughout the winter, in a well-lighted room or on a window sill in the kitchen. Such plants succeed best if they are transplanted in autumn, before they are too big, to pots or to a small box and left outdoors so they may be subjected to freezing temperatures for two or three weeks before they are brought indoors.

#### *Drying and Storing*

Herb materials usually are dried by spreading them on a clean surface, but some leafy stems are tied in bunches and hung up in ventilated, dust-free rooms. Artificial heat and fine-mesh wire trays are sometimes used. Shade-drying is preferable to sun-drying to retain the natural color and to minimize the loss of essential oils. Dried leaf and flower material is commonly pulverized by hand rubbing. Dried fruits, seeds, and roots are usually ground. The prepared herb material should be stored in tight (preferably dark) screw-cap, glass containers and kept away from direct light.

#### *Some Uses of Culinary Herbs*

**B**RIEF suggestions for the use of herbs grown, dried, and tried at Ithaca, New York, follow, but the use of herbs is a matter of individual taste and one that offers any cook opportunities for experimenting. Dried herbs present a wide variety of interesting and tempting flavors. As a general rule they may be added in the amount desired (a pinch or two the first time) to sauces, soups, stews, and suitable casserole dishes. The pleasant odor of certain dried herbs, such as lavender, has led to their use in sachets among stored linens and garments; still others make refreshing and stimulating teas. The parts of the plant used when dried are indicated for each of the following:

*Chives* (leaves): add to soups, stews, sauces, souffles, scrambled eggs, omelettes, fondues, scalloped vegetables, cottage cheese.

*Garlic* (bulb of cloves): crush a small clove and rub it on the salad bowl or on roast beef before placing it in the oven. Drop a split clove into a pint of French dressing.

*Dill* (stem, leaves, flowers, seeds): add to vinegar, soup or fish. Boil a small quantity with cabbage, turnips, or cauliflower. Use fresh or dried to flavor pickles.

*Caraway* (seeds): bake in cookies, rolls, or bread; mix with cottage cheese or sauerkraut.

*Coriander* (seeds): crush and add to meat sauces or ground meat; use in making pickles.

*Fennel* (stem, leaves, flowers, seeds): add to salads, soups, stews; use fresh as a garnish or sparingly like celery or endive.

*Lovage* (leaves): use like celery in salads or stews; prepare fresh leaves as pot herbs or use for tea.

*Parsley* (leaves): add to soups, stews, sauces, boiled or creamed vegetables; sprinkle on the ingredients of a tossed salad.

*Marjoram* (leaves, flowerheads): add to stuffings, ground meat, sausage, soups, stews, salad.

*Basil* (leaves): use in any tomato cookery; add to tomato juice, salad, omelette, and soup, especially mock turtle and oxtail.

*Hyssop* (leaves): use in herb blends for vegetables, soups, and stews.

*Sage* (leaves): add to dressing for roast fowl, ground pork, baked fish, and cheese dishes; make a refreshing tea to be served with sugar and lemon.

*Summer savory* (leaves and young shoots): use with green or yellow string beans in canning or preparing dishes for the table directly; add to soup, stew, meat-dressing, or baked dishes.

*Winter savory* (leaves): use the same as savory and thyme, but in smaller amounts.

*Thyme* (leaves): add a pinch to enliven any soup, stew, sauce, meat dressing, poultry stuffing, meat loaf, clam juice or chowder.

*Tarragon* (leaves): add to vinegar or French dressing or to salads directly; use in fish or meat sauce.

*Horehound* (leaves): brew as tea sweetened with honey for coughs and colds; use to flavor homemade cough drops or candy.

*Lemon balm* (leaves): cook with meat and vegetables; add to soups, sauces; brew as tea; use fresh leaves for flavoring iced drinks.

*Peppermint, Spearmint, and Applemint* (leaves): brew with tea or alone for a hot drink; add to vinegar to make a sauce for lamb; sprinkle in fruit

salads; cook with apples to make mint jelly; use fresh leaves for flavoring iced drinks. Cook a sprig of spearmint with fresh or frozen peas.

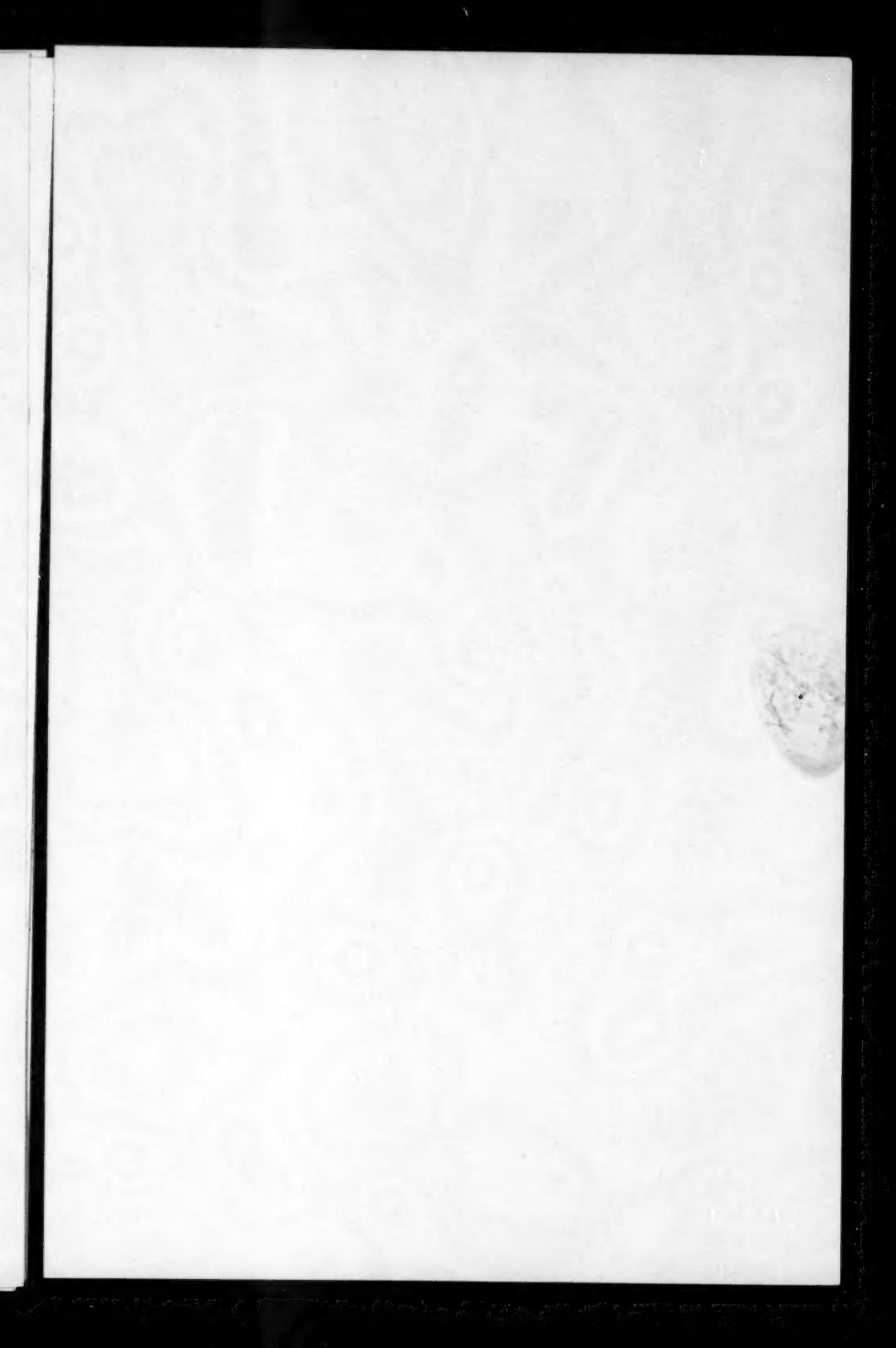
*Pennyroyal* (leaves): use like the mints.

*Chamomile* (flower heads): brew for 10 minutes with boiling water to make a soothing tea.

*Sweet woodruff* (top of plant): place some among linens. Add a few leaves to punch, tea, or other beverage.

*Lavender* (top of plant, flowers): put a packet among handkerchiefs or lingerie; use leaves in herb blends.

*Costmary* (leaves): place the leaves among linens. Use sparingly to flavor tea and iced drinks.



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